

Weeds Coming Up To Your Heart 2018

A field was left un-mowed so long, wild grass
grew tall enough to bury a tree growing dead
center of it. Almost.

You knew there was a tree in there
under that faint balloon of
leaves hovering just above the grass
and if you weren't afraid of snakes and
walked towards that tree, you'd see
it was a pear tree and there'd be a
shadow of it where grass couldn't grow.

There'd be a lot of pears fallen, turning
brown and you'd hear occasionally
the thump of another one coming down
and soft snarls from yellow jackets
picking their way through swale.

You'd smell sweetness, tasting
like brown sugar and honey, and
you'd remember contentment like
it was a Sunday, your parents had
missed church, stayed in bed,
sent you out of the house. So—

here you were, under lonesomeness that was
a half dead pear tree in the middle of weeds
coming all the way up to your heart and it didn't
matter if you got stung or didn't bring a thermos
of Kool-Aid or peanut butter crackers or
if nobody remembered you were gone—

You just laid down, stretched out flat
in that tall grass and made the shape of yourself
in sunshine at the edge of that suffocating patch
of absence where, now and then, a slight wind
sent a hum of shade over you and it felt like some
roots of that gasp of tree found their way into you
and you resolved you'd never be laid to waste.

A Contraption Made of Dreams

Prose Poem 2018

After plaid dresses, patent leather shoes, photos of sailors with tattoos; after ceramic panthers and parakeets that made life feel a little more exotic; after twirling hair in pin curls, reading comics while Dad read news; after hiding *The Grapes of Wrath* behind a worn, hard-back copy of *Little Women*; after all that, I planned to give it all the slip.

Packed baloney/mayo sandwiches, chocolate chips, and silver quarters saved up to buy a pink plastic purse and *Tangee*, the invisible lipstick.

What's left of that America pecks a little kiss on our cheeks when we go back home to attend re-unions, funerals. Glancing into what once was a breakfast nook, we see a *Better Homes and Gardens* dining room; small paned windows eagerly consumed by plate glass sliding doors.

My last trip back, a wisp of Dad's ghost sat in an old maple kitchen chair. One knee crossed over the other, right elbow cupped in the palm of his left hand, he stared into space imagining some invention: water wings tucked into dynamite sticks that would explode on impact with swimming pools, travel tooth brushes, cherry flavored cokes, who knows.

I saw myself too, up early before school, hunched in that chair pulled up to the kitchen stove, my feet on the open oven door to warm my toes; whispering with Mom, waiting for water to boil for our cups of Instant Maxwell House "brew."

That chair once made a sound of shattering glass, escaping canaries, a foot tangled in bike wheel spokes; the sound of peddling ferociously in dark, above side-walks and rustling trees; above halos of mist around faint glows of street lights; the slinky grind of oiled gears careening me, astride a last century's Penny farthing, its gigantic wheel I didn't know how to stop, climb down from.

I've lived years away now from a square house on a slight hill in a small town. When I looked across our valley at that opposing hill where a water tower still stands like a religious beacon shining down on people who had little to do with the rest of the world and nothing to do with the universe, I know why Dad left this chair here; because for a seemingly inconsequential moment as a child, I sat in it, looked across the valley and knew I'd leave it someday on a contraption made of dreams

Ploughing the Sun 2018

Carport next to the chicken shed,
a Model-T Ford, parked in shade
on a pool of oil like some giant
Esterbrook pen had leaked a gallon
of ink— this was just too much
temptation.

A kid had to creep in there,
stand on the running board,
have a look at the past while
listening to chickens cluck
cluck, cluck; *you shouldn't be*
there, then alarm bell squawks
when she slid to ground.

The kid stood up in scuffed and
unlaced shoes, her blue eyes
wide as nets in a pollywog pool,
scooping up chaos; chicks,
swirling as if they'd morphed
into tadpoles, black mice,
their velvety bodies scurrying,
out from under nest box straw and hens
who thought the Ford belonged to them,
a pillow flight of feathers.

Another day, there was a duck.
The nameless white duck, the one
the English Setter could pick up
in his mouth and put on his back
to ride all around the yard. Dad
made a home movie to prove this.

Or maybe it was Dad who put the duck up
on the dog named Cecil; or Cecil who killed
the duck when the kid was on her first
trip away from home; a train trip—
off to North Dakota to meet that
part of the family that never beat it

past the Rockies. More likely though,
Dad wrung it's neck and the nameless duck
was eaten off dinner plates while the kid
was not around to scream.

She howled though. Like a coyote—
each time the train went through a tunnel;
felt pretty sure the other passengers
thought they'd heard a real coyote.
Checked her success out with the grand-
parents. Both assured her, yes, everyone
thought she was a real coyote on the train.

And Uncle Clarence and Aunt Eileen
picked them up in a 1947 Nash 600 sedan
shaped like a Good-Year blimp.
This new car was the subject of conversation
all the long drive through snow to a farm
with more than chickens, dogs and ducks.
She got her first look at calves and colts.

Also her first look at six feet of snow;
banks of it on top of which she was lifted
to stand to have a picture taken; bare fists
on hips, hair loose in wind, no jacket, just
clenched teeth and a brave expression on.
On the back of that photo, someone wrote
Dee age 5 Cavalier, North Dakota.

Kids know some actual facts about things,
store them in growing pains of shin bones,
in lost and new teeth; snips of consciousness,
chips off the old block of eternity.
They can recall struggle before they had a say
about it; suffocation in the grip of darkness—
the effort it took to loosen it, find levers
to shoot them out of it, aimed at the sky,
hoping to plough the sun.

Look At Her Pop! 2017

Like a teen-age girl
with fancy free hair
by her own sweet will
April unbraids hers
EVERYWHERE!

Flings out her arms,
gives a little twist
at the hips to twirl
her skirts and shouts

LOOK AT ME!
LOOK AT ME!
I AM BEAUTIFUL!

No sticks and bones,
your skinny girl's
a cherry bomb
with soft pink cheeks and
she's
invited to the prom!